

Senate Bill No. 575

CHAPTER 601

An act to amend Section 65589.5 of the Government Code, relating to local planning.

[Approved by Governor October 6, 2005. Filed with
Secretary of State October 6, 2005.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 575, Torlakson. Housing development projects.

The Planning and Zoning Law requires that a local agency not disapprove a housing development project, including farmworker housing, for very low, low-, or moderate-income households or condition its approval, including through the use of design review standards, in a manner that renders the project infeasible for development for those households unless it makes written findings, based upon substantial evidence in the record, as to one of a number of specified conditions.

The Planning and Zoning Law also requires that in any action to enforce these provisions, if a court finds that the local agency disapproved the project or conditioned its approval without making the required findings or without making sufficient findings supported by substantial evidence, the court shall issue an order or judgment to compel compliance with these provisions within 60 days, including an award of reasonable attorney's fees and costs of suit to the plaintiff or petitioner who proposed the housing development, and may issue further orders to ensure that the purposes and policies of these provisions are fulfilled if its order or judgment has not been carried out within the 60-day period.

This bill would revise the conditions upon which a disapproval or a conditional approval of the housing development project is based.

The bill would expressly authorize the applicant for the housing development project or any person who would be eligible to apply for residency in that project to bring an action in court pursuant to specified provisions and would also authorize the court to vacate the decision of the local agency, as specified, deem the application complete, and impose fines pursuant to specified procedures if the court finds that the local agency acted in bad faith and failed to carry out the court's order or judgment within the 60-day period.

The bill would also specify procedures for appeal of the court's order.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 65589.5 of the Government Code is amended to read:

65589.5. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) The lack of housing is a critical problem that threatens the economic, environmental, and social quality of life in California.

(2) California housing has become the most expensive in the nation. The excessive cost of the state's housing supply is partially caused by activities and policies of many local governments that limit the approval of housing, increase the cost of land for housing, and require that high fees and exactions be paid by producers of housing.

(3) Among the consequences of those actions are discrimination against low-income and minority households, lack of housing to support employment growth, imbalance in jobs and housing, reduced mobility, urban sprawl, excessive commuting, and air quality deterioration.

(4) Many local governments do not give adequate attention to the economic, environmental, and social costs of decisions that result in disapproval of housing projects, reduction in density of housing projects, and excessive standards for housing projects.

(b) It is the policy of the state that a local government not reject or make infeasible housing developments that contribute to meeting the housing need determined pursuant to this article without a thorough analysis of the economic, social, and environmental effects of the action and without complying with subdivision (d).

(c) The Legislature also recognizes that premature and unnecessary development of agricultural lands for urban uses continues to have adverse effects on the availability of those lands for food and fiber production and on the economy of the state. Furthermore, it is the policy of the state that development should be guided away from prime agricultural lands; therefore, in implementing this section, local jurisdictions should encourage, to the maximum extent practicable, in filling existing urban areas.

(d) A local agency shall not disapprove a housing development project, including farmworker housing as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 50199.50 of the Health and Safety Code, for very low, low-, or moderate-income households or condition approval, including through the use of design review standards, in a manner that renders the project infeasible for development for the use of very low, low-, or moderate-income households unless it makes written findings, based upon substantial evidence in the record, as to one of the following:

(1) The jurisdiction has adopted a housing element pursuant to this article that has been revised in accordance with Section 65588, is in substantial compliance with this article, and the jurisdiction has met or exceeded its share of the regional housing need allocation pursuant to Section 65584 for the planning period for the income category proposed for the housing development project, provided that any disapproval or conditional approval shall not be based on any of the reasons prohibited by Section 65008. If the housing development project includes a mix of income categories, and the jurisdiction has not met or exceeded its share of the regional housing need for one or more of those categories, then this

paragraph shall not be used to disapprove or conditionally approve the project. The share of the regional housing need met by the jurisdiction shall be calculated consistently with the forms and definitions that may be adopted by the Department of Housing and Community Development pursuant to Section 65400. Any disapproval or conditional approval pursuant to this paragraph shall be in accordance with applicable law, rule, or standards.

(2) The development project as proposed would have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health or safety, and there is no feasible method to satisfactorily mitigate or avoid the specific adverse impact without rendering the development unaffordable to low- and moderate-income households. As used in this paragraph, a “specific, adverse impact” means a significant, quantifiable, direct, and unavoidable impact, based on objective, identified written public health or safety standards, policies, or conditions as they existed on the date the application was deemed complete. Inconsistency with the zoning ordinance or general plan land use designation shall not constitute a specific, adverse impact upon the public health or safety.

(3) The denial of the project or imposition of conditions is required in order to comply with specific state or federal law, and there is no feasible method to comply without rendering the development unaffordable to low- and moderate-income households.

(4) The development project is proposed on land zoned for agriculture or resource preservation that is surrounded on at least two sides by land being used for agricultural or resource preservation purposes, or which does not have adequate water or wastewater facilities to serve the project.

(5) The development project is inconsistent with both the jurisdiction’s zoning ordinance and general plan land use designation as specified in any element of the general plan as it existed on the date the application was deemed complete, and the jurisdiction has adopted a revised housing element in accordance with Section 65588 that is in substantial compliance with this article.

(A) This paragraph cannot be utilized to disapprove or conditionally approve a housing development project if the development project is proposed on a site that is identified as suitable or available for very low, low-, or moderate-income households in the jurisdiction’s housing element, and consistent with the density specified in the housing element, even though it is inconsistent with both the jurisdiction’s zoning ordinance and general plan land use designation.

(B) If the local agency has failed, in accordance with Section 65583.2, to identify in the inventory of land in its housing element sites that can be developed for housing within the planning period and that are sufficient to provide for the jurisdiction’s share of the regional housing need for all income levels pursuant to Section 65584, then this paragraph shall not be utilized to disapprove or conditionally approve a housing development project proposed for a site designated in any element of the general plan for residential uses or designated in any element of the general plan for

commercial uses if residential uses are permitted or conditionally permitted within commercial designations. In any action in court, the burden of proof shall be on the local agency to show that its housing element does identify adequate sites with appropriate zoning and development standards and with services and facilities to accommodate the local agency's share of the regional housing need for the very low and low-income categories.

(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to relieve the local agency from complying with the Congestion Management Program required by Chapter 2.6 (commencing with Section 65088) of Division 1 of Title 7 or the California Coastal Act (Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000) of the Public Resources Code). Neither shall anything in this section be construed to relieve the local agency from making one or more of the findings required pursuant to Section 21081 of the Public Resources Code or otherwise complying with the California Environmental Quality Act (Division 13 (commencing with Section 21000) of the Public Resources Code).

(f) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit a local agency from requiring the development project to comply with objective, quantifiable, written development standards, conditions, and policies appropriate to, and consistent with, meeting the jurisdiction's share of the regional housing need pursuant to Section 65584. However, the development standards, conditions, and policies shall be applied to facilitate and accommodate development at the density permitted on the site and proposed by the development project. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit a local agency from imposing fees and other exactions otherwise authorized by law that are essential to provide necessary public services and facilities to the development project.

(g) This section shall be applicable to charter cities because the Legislature finds that the lack of housing is a critical statewide problem.

(h) The following definitions apply for the purposes of this section:

(1) "Feasible" means capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, social, and technological factors.

(2) "Housing development project" means a use consisting of either of the following:

(A) Residential units only.

(B) Mixed-use developments consisting of residential and nonresidential uses in which nonresidential uses are limited to neighborhood commercial uses and to the first floor of buildings that are two or more stories. As used in this paragraph, "neighborhood commercial" means small-scale general or specialty stores that furnish goods and services primarily to residents of the neighborhood.

(3) "Housing for very low, low-, or moderate-income households" means that either (A) at least 20 percent of the total units shall be sold or rented to lower income households, as defined in Section 50079.5 of the Health and Safety Code, or (B) 100 percent of the units shall be sold or

rented to moderate-income households as defined in Section 50093 of the Health and Safety Code, or middle-income households, as defined in Section 65008 of this code. Housing units targeted for lower income households shall be made available at a monthly housing cost that does not exceed 30 percent of 60 percent of area median income with adjustments for household size made in accordance with the adjustment factors on which the lower income eligibility limits are based. Housing units targeted for persons and families of moderate income shall be made available at a monthly housing cost that does not exceed 30 percent of 100 percent of area median income with adjustments for household size made in accordance with the adjustment factors on which the moderate income eligibility limits are based.

(4) “Area median income” means area median income as periodically established by the Department of Housing and Community Development pursuant to Section 50093 of the Health and Safety Code. The developer shall provide sufficient legal commitments to ensure continued availability of units for very low or low-income households in accordance with the provisions of this subdivision for 30 years.

(5) “Neighborhood” means a planning area commonly identified in a community’s planning documents, and identified as a neighborhood by the individuals residing and working within the neighborhood. Documentation demonstrating that the area meets the definition of neighborhood may include a map prepared for planning purposes which lists the name and boundaries of the neighborhood.

(6) “Disapprove the development project” includes any instance in which a local agency does either of the following:

(A) Votes on a proposed housing development project application and the application is disapproved.

(B) Fails to comply with the time periods specified in subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) of Section 65950. An extension of time pursuant to Article 5 (commencing with Section 65950) shall be deemed to be an extension of time pursuant to this paragraph.

(i) If any city, county, or city and county denies approval or imposes restrictions, including design changes, a reduction of allowable densities or the percentage of a lot that may be occupied by a building or structure under the applicable planning and zoning in force at the time the application is deemed complete pursuant to Section 65943, that have a substantial adverse effect on the viability or affordability of a housing development for very low, low-, or moderate-income households, and the denial of the development or the imposition of restrictions on the development is the subject of a court action which challenges the denial, then the burden of proof shall be on the local legislative body to show that its decision is consistent with the findings as described in subdivision (d) and that the findings are supported by substantial evidence in the record.

(j) When a proposed housing development project complies with applicable, objective general plan and zoning standards and criteria, including design review standards, in effect at the time that the housing

development project's application is determined to be complete, but the local agency proposes to disapprove the project or to approve it upon the condition that the project be developed at a lower density, the local agency shall base its decision regarding the proposed housing development project upon written findings supported by substantial evidence on the record that both of the following conditions exist:

(1) The housing development project would have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health or safety unless the project is disapproved or approved upon the condition that the project be developed at a lower density. As used in this paragraph, a "specific, adverse impact" means a significant, quantifiable, direct, and unavoidable impact, based on objective, identified written public health or safety standards, policies, or conditions as they existed on the date the application was deemed complete.

(2) There is no feasible method to satisfactorily mitigate or avoid the adverse impact identified pursuant to paragraph (1), other than the disapproval of the housing development project or the approval of the project upon the condition that it be developed at a lower density.

(k) The applicant or any person who would be eligible to apply for residency in the development may bring an action to enforce this section. If in any action brought to enforce the provisions of this section, a court finds that the local agency disapproved a project or conditioned its approval in a manner rendering it infeasible for the development of housing for very low, low-, or moderate-income households, including farmworker housing, without making the findings required by this section or without making sufficient findings supported by substantial evidence, the court shall issue an order or judgment compelling compliance with this section within 60 days, including, but not limited to, an order that the local agency take action on the development project. The court shall retain jurisdiction to ensure that its order or judgment is carried out and shall award reasonable attorney's fees and costs of suit to the plaintiff or petitioner who proposed the housing development, except under extraordinary circumstances in which the court finds that awarding fees would not further the purposes of this section. If the court determines that its order or judgment has not been carried out within 60 days, the court may issue further orders as provided by law to ensure that the purposes and policies of this section are fulfilled, including, but not limited to, an order to vacate the decision of the local agency, in which case the application for the project, as constituted at the time the local agency took the initial action determined to be in violation of this section, along with any standard conditions determined by the court to be generally imposed by the local agency on similar projects, shall be deemed approved unless the applicant consents to a different decision or action by the local agency.

(l) If the court finds that the local agency (1) acted in bad faith when it disapproved or conditionally approved the housing development in violation of this section and (2) failed to carry out the court's order or judgment within 60 days as described in paragraph (k), the court in

addition to any other remedies provided by this section, may impose fines upon the local agency that the local agency shall be required to deposit into a housing trust fund. Fines shall not be paid from funds that are already dedicated for affordable housing, including, but not limited to, redevelopment or low- and moderate-income housing funds and federal HOME and CDBG funds. The local agency shall commit the money in the trust fund within five years for the sole purpose of financing newly constructed housing units affordable to extremely low, very low, or low-income households. For purposes of this section, “bad faith” shall mean an action that is frivolous or otherwise entirely without merit.

(m) Any action brought to enforce the provisions of this section shall be brought pursuant to Section 1094.5 of the Code of Civil Procedure, and the local agency shall prepare and certify the record of proceedings in accordance with subdivision (c) of Section 1094.6 of the Code of Civil Procedure no later than 30 days after the petition is served, provided that the cost of preparation of the record shall be borne by the local agency. Upon entry of the trial court’s order, a party shall, in order to obtain appellate review of the order, file a petition within 20 days after service upon it of a written notice of the entry of the order, or within such further time not exceeding an additional 20 days as the trial court may for good cause allow. If the local agency appeals the judgment of the trial court, the local agency shall post a bond, in an amount to be determined by the court, to the benefit of the plaintiff if the plaintiff is the project applicant.

(n) In any action, the record of the proceedings before the local agency shall be filed as expeditiously as possible and, notwithstanding Section 1094.6 of the Code of Civil Procedure or subdivision (m) of this section, all or part of the record may be prepared (1) by the petitioner with the petition or petitioner’s points and authorities, (2) by the respondent with respondent’s points and authorities, (3) after payment of costs by the petitioner, or (4) as otherwise directed by the court. If the expense of preparing the record has been borne by the petitioner and the petitioner is the prevailing party, the expense shall be taxable as costs.